

Women's political representation in Solomon Islands

by Kerryn Baker

1 July 2024



Wilson Mamae supporters march in Honiara's streets

Photo Credit: Kerryn Baker

After a **12-month delay**, the 12th Solomon Islands national general elections were held on 17 April 2024. For the first time, joint elections were held, with most provincial assemblies and the Honiara City Council also going to the polls. For women, the results were mixed. Eight women were elected overall — three to the national parliament, two to Honiara City Council and three to provincial assemblies — representing significant individual achievements.

As a whole, women's representation remains low, and current institutional measures to promote women's engagement in politics have seen limited success. But new initiatives might offer opportunities to increase women's access to politics.

Before the election, there were four women incumbents in the 50-seat parliament. Two, Freda Tuki Soriacomua and Lillian Maefai, contested the 2024 elections. The remaining women members of parliament, Lanelle Tanangada and Ethel Vokia, declined to contest in 2024, with their husbands, both former members of parliament, contesting in their stead.

The “**widows and wives**” phenomenon in Solomon Islands politics is well documented, with a common pathway to politics for women being through association with a male spouse or relative who is a politician. The decision of half of Solomon Islands' women members of parliament to step aside so that their husbands could contest is significant in a context where women are under-represented, as both members of parliament and candidates. In the 2024 national elections, 20 women stood out of 334 candidates, making up less than six per cent of the field.

Three women were elected at the national level. Soriacomua, an Ownership Unity Responsibility Party candidate, was re-elected in Temotu Vatud, while Choylin Yim Douglas and Cathy Launa Nori, both independent candidates, won the seats of Ngella and Maringe/Kokota, respectively.

Douglas and Nori are new to parliament but both have contested before. Douglas contested Ngella in 2019, coming second with 22 per cent of the vote. Nori had contested Maringe/Kokota twice previously, coming third in 2014 (with 13 per cent of the vote) and second in 2019 (with 33 per cent of the vote). Strategies that span multiple electoral cycles are **key** in electoral success in the Pacific. Douglas and Nori's successes clearly build on their previous electoral experience.

Six women candidates ran as independents, accounting for 30 per cent of female candidates, compared to 34 per cent of total candidates. In **Solomon Islands**, there is a legislative mandate for parties to include at least 10 per cent women candidates on their rosters, but loopholes greatly limit its impact.

In 2024, 13 parties contested the election. Of these, six endorsed no women at all. Just four parties met the 10 per cent threshold — the Green Party (one out of two candidates), the People's Liberal Democratic Party (five out of 30 candidates), the Solomon Islands People's First Party (two out of seven candidates) and the Solomon Islands Party for Rural Advancement (two out of 17 candidates). This suggests that parties could — and, according to legislation, should — be doing more to facilitate the inclusion of women on their candidate rosters.

Women candidates were roughly as competitive as men at the national level — their average vote share was 14.7 per cent, compared to 15.2 per cent for male candidates. Yet, women do not stand for parliament in the same numbers as men, and this **clearly impacts** the levels of women's representation in parliament.

The joint elections, with voting for Honiara City Council and seven of nine provincial assemblies held concurrently with the national parliamentary elections, show a stark contrast in levels of women's representation. Following the 2024 elections, women make up six per cent of the national parliament — with three out of 50 seats — and 17 per cent of Honiara City Council — with two out of 12 seats.

In the provincial seats, women candidates did not fare as well. Women made up fewer than five per cent of provincial candidates and won just three out of the 123 provincial seats contested in the 2024 joint elections. A sole woman member was elected to each of the Isabel, Temotu and Malaita provincial assemblies. In the Central, Guadalcanal, Makira–Ulawa and Rennell–Bellona provinces, all-male assemblies were elected.

Prior to the 2024 election, the Solomon Islands Cabinet endorsed a proposal to amend electoral legislation to allow for temporary special measures, or reserved seats, for women in provincial assemblies. Women's organisations in Solomon Islands have been **working tirelessly** for years to progress this issue. With a new

government, the status of this amendment is unclear, but the low number of women elected to provincial seats in the 2024 joint elections highlights the urgent need for more such measures.

This blog was first published on [East Asia Forum](#).

[Download PDF](#).

Disclosures:

This research was supported by the [Pacific Research Program](#), with funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The views are those of the author only.

Author/s:

Kerryn Baker

Kerryn Baker is a Fellow at the Department of Pacific Affairs at the Australian National University.

Link:

<https://devpolicy.org/female-politicians-struggle-to-get-off-the-blocks-in-the-solomon-islands-20240701/>